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# STABILITY IN KEY AREAS (SIKA) – EAST

## SYNOPSIS: GENDER MAINSTREAMING



*Girls from the Khoshi District High School are learning basic computer skills in a computer lab established through an advocacy initiative managed by the Khoshi DDA+, as a result of SIKA-East training in advocacy and outreach.*

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# STABILITY IN KEY AREAS (SIKA) – EAST

## SYNOPSIS: GENDER MAINSTREAMING JULY 2014

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### **Related documents:**

*SIKA-East Work Plan for the Option Period – March 7, 2014 to September 6, 2015 (approved June 17, 2014) and SIKA-East Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, May 2013 (approved May 13, 2013)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors vary significantly across the six provinces in which Stability in Key Areas (SIKA)-East works. These factors are influenced by conflict, ethnicity, culture, rural/urban locale, age, economic status, and other dynamics. They also contribute to distinctions in how women and men exercise authority, communicate and interact, perceive problems, pursue solutions, access opportunities, and confront barriers.

Recognizing gender dimensions and applying a gender-responsive approach are fundamental aspects of leadership, good governance, and accountability; these go hand-in-hand with efforts to reduce gender disparities and discrimination. Therefore, SIKA-East places gender equity, female leadership, and inclusion at the heart of program management and implementation.

Mainstreaming gender is not only about adding a *female component* into an existing process or activity, and it goes beyond increasing women's participation. Rather, mainstreaming gender means bringing the experience, knowledge, and interests of women and men to influence programmatic objectives and anticipated results. Effectively, gender must be a lens through which programming is considered – from design to implementation to evaluation.

## STRATEGY AND APPROACH

Given SIKA-East's objectives, it is critical that governance and decision-making processes be truly representative of both men and women. This will enable all to contribute to the advancement of Afghanistan. The SIKA-East Gender Mainstreaming Strategy provides the framework to operationalize these aims, guiding staff and partners to develop awareness and competency to:

- Equitably enable women and men to become informed citizens; voice interests, concerns, and needs; access and control resources; and influence and benefit from public services; and
- Assist women to become effective leaders and representatives, with expanded participation in local governance processes and inclusion in public decision-making.

SIKA-East assists partners to apply gender-sensitive perspectives to planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of program activities. This includes supporting the comprehensive involvement of women in governance and development processes that contribute to advancing Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) policies and practice and facilitating equitable participation and access for men and women, with appreciation of the different roles and contributions of each.



**Women community leaders from Chaki Wardak and Saydabad Districts, Maydan Wardak Province, discuss community priorities and ongoing projects in their districts.**

**“Recognizing gender dimensions and applying a gender-responsive approach are fundamental aspects of leadership, good governance, and accountability.”**



**Men and women community leaders gather to consolidate and build consensus for proposed grant projects in Maydan Wardak Province.**

## ADVANCING IDLG AND MRRD PRIORITIES

SIKA-East will integrate and complement key gender policies and priorities of GIRoA, particularly the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).

Core commitments to gender in the *Sub-National Governance Policy* developed by IDLG are at the heart of SIKA-East's mainstreaming approach. To achieve this, IDLG outlines the following points to be undertaken with the support of the Provincial Governor:

- Both genders are an active part of all discussions, initiatives, and consensus building;
- Special efforts are needed to bridge the gaps seen historically between the two genders;
- An enabling environment needs to be created, where both men and women can have their strategic needs met; and
- Both men and women make valuable human resources for the Province.<sup>i</sup>

**“SIKA-East will integrate and complement key gender policies and priorities of GIRoA, particularly IDLG and MRRD.”**



**Women from Khost Province take part in group work after a SIKA-East community mobilization training session.**

MRRD's *Gender Policy*<sup>ii</sup> also provides a critical foundation for SIKA-East's gender mainstreaming efforts. Like MRRD, SIKA-East believes that gender equality is essential for growth and poverty reduction. Failure to decrease disparities hampers the successful attainment of development goals, such as reducing child mortality, improving safe motherhood, and decreasing malnutrition rates. The achievement of economic development will not be possible without the inclusion of women's priorities, development of their leadership, and full participation in society and government. SIKA-East will work closely with MRRD programs, such as the National Area Based Development Program (NABDP), to exchange lessons and best practices and to share accomplishments to improve coordination to reach maximum impact.

SIKA-East's approach also aligns with the IDLG and MRRD *Policy for Improving Governance and Development in Districts and Villages*, promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and the active participation of women at the district level.

The policy mandates that District Coordination Councils ensure “that gender issues are fully reflected in development planning, monitoring and evaluation, resolving public complaints, and oversight and public outreach,”<sup>iii</sup> among other responsibilities. SIKA-East will work with the District Development Assemblies–Plus (DDA+)<sup>iv</sup>, similar unified leadership bodies at the district level, to develop and apply skills to carry out such responsibilities.

## ANALYZING GENDER DIMENSIONS

During its work in the provinces and districts covered by the program, SIKA-East will explore the five dimensions of gender described below, with particular emphasis on women's status. SIKA-East will share its analysis to inform programming and the wider discourse on gender, inclusive practices, and women's empowerment in Afghanistan in accord with GIRoA aims.

## VOICE, REPRESENTATION, AND LEADERSHIP

Voice, representation, and leadership are essential elements of effective engagement in governance and development. Yet women commonly have few avenues to promote their views; they remain



largely unrepresented in sub-national governance institutions; and they often go unrecognized and unrewarded for leadership capacity. In support of overcoming such barriers, SIKA-East will analyze women's and men's relative access to forums to promote perspectives; membership on the DDA+ and other decision-making bodies; and standing as leaders among peers and constituents.

## **INFLUENCE AND DECISION-MAKING**

Within traditional roles oriented to family and community, women wield informal power – as mothers, teachers, and volunteers, community leaders, and local entrepreneurs. Although this informal leadership often focuses on community service, women's skills can be harnessed and formalized to enable them to play an assertive role in the public realm. Illuminating progress, opportunities, and barriers, SIKA-East will probe women's and men's spheres of influence, ability to shape opinions, and impact on key facets of public decision-making, such as establishing priorities, allocating resources, and delivering services.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Local gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors significantly affect women's ability to participate in public affairs. Decisions on involvement are frequently regulated by male elders and subject to strict conditions, such as maintaining *parda* and requiring the presence of *mahrams*<sup>v</sup>. SIKA-East will explore diverse aspects of women's and men's participation during the program's governance and development activities, including participant numbers and overall profile; time, space, and mobility requirements; influential security factors; and method and quality of contributions.

## **ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Issues of transparency and accountability in government are positively correlated with citizen access to information. However, SIKA-East's experience indicates women are often overlooked or excluded from the flow of important public information, such as notice of consultations, decisions, and opportunities to contribute as well as input on needed public services. Supporting implementation of the Sub-National Governance Policy, SIKA-East will examine information typically available to women and men during key governance processes, ways it is used, and horizontal and vertical flow of communication between leaders, institutions, and constituents.

## **BENEFIT FROM SERVICES**

The delivery of services is especially important for women; their primary roles as mothers and caregivers significantly depend on basic services, such as education, health care, access to water, and sanitation. Women are often marginalized from the identification of services needed, and their perspectives on type, availability, and quality of services delivered are often overlooked or discounted. SIKA-East will assess the gender sensitivity of services delivered during the program. This includes female and male perspectives on priorities, user needs, and decision-making responsibility and authority as well as allocation of benefits.

**“SIKA-East will share its analysis to inform programming and the wider discourse on gender, inclusive practices, and women's empowerment in Afghanistan in accord with GIRoA aims.”**



**Women participate in group exercises during a DDA+ conference in Logar Province. Amongst other topics, they discussed how to integrate women's priorities into broader development plans.**

## FORGING INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

SIKA-East is committed to promoting gender mainstreaming within the context of the areas in which it works, where Islam and culture strongly impact gender dynamics. Thus, the program will draw on Islamic tenets, customary institutions, and traditional leaders to advance dialogue and action on equity and inclusion. This will help build social consensus on program methods and practices, and create a more secure and enabling environment for women to participate. In this way, SIKA-East will be able to engage effectively with recognized women leaders at district and provincial levels, while also reaching women who may have fewer opportunities to exercise public leadership but nonetheless are valuable leaders within their families and communities.

Therefore, in addition to male and female District Development Assembly and District Community Council representatives, SIKA-East will engage with a broad spectrum of actors who can effectively

**“SIKA-East will engage with religious scholars, tribal leaders, provincial council members, Loya Jirga representatives, midwives, educators, and other female and male societal opinion shapers.”**



**Community leaders in Khost province attend a resource coordination meeting. Although not pictured, the event was attended by both male and**

contribute to bringing change at different levels. These include religious scholars, tribal leaders, Provincial Council members, *Loya Jirga* representatives, midwives, educators, and other female and male societal opinion-shapers. Together, motivated and mobilized, they can positively shape the gender landscape.

Within this cadre of stakeholders, SIKA-East will engage with female role models to encourage and inspire women to action. These role models provide compelling examples of trailblazers and public figures with critical roles to play in sustaining momentum in women's participation, and in creating informal support networks among them.

SIKA-East will also engage women who contribute to family and community in traditional roles, while opening windows for institutional roles as informed citizens and potential leaders. Although in many SIKA-East areas, women's public authority and visibility are constrained, they play influential roles closer to home, promoting children's access to education; healthier food production; better management of communal conflicts; and similar compelling issues that resonate at local levels. SIKA-East will leverage these as valuable entry points to include marginalized rural women in dialogue and decision-making. The program will also facilitate

their access to district and provincial platforms to interact with authorities and hold them accountable to address such needs.

In addition, SIKA-East will focus on engaging with male allies – those men who value the contributions of women and who encourage reducing disparities and discrimination that adversely impact females. In the traditional Afghan context, male allies can speak credibly about issues that concern both men and women. As allies, men can – often more successfully – generate support for different initiatives that directly and indirectly impact women; and more generally, they can help raise awareness of issues that have an impact on commonly held attitudes and practices.

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

### DEVELOPING GENDER-FOCUSED RELATIONSHIPS

SIKA-East will develop gender-focused relationships with IDLG, MRRD, and other relevant actors to ensure coordination on policy and practice and to enhance access to technical support on gender mainstreaming. Activities will include:

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GIROA GENDER UNITS

SIKA-East will offer expanded opportunities to Kabul-based IDLG and MRRD staff to share perspectives, expertise, and priorities and to participate in decision-making about program design and implementation. Facilitating this, SIKA-East will hold periodic meetings to maintain open communication, coordinate efforts, and explore emerging opportunities and priorities.

### PROVIDING TARGETED GENDER ASSISTANCE TO IDLG AND MRRD

SIKA-East will assist IDLG and MRRD to strengthen gender assistance provided to MRRD/IDLG field staff. This will include activities such as the gender conferences IDLG has expressed interest in organizing with the assistance of SIKA-East and SIKA-South, bringing together focal points from the two regions for training on gender awareness and skills.

### CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH MOWA AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

SIKA-East will also work with IDLG and MRRD to bring the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) into program planning and implementation. In addition, the program will engage with other initiatives that address relevant gender themes in governance and development.

### BUILDING GENDER COMPETENCIES

SIKA-East will deliver a gender-focused capacity-building curriculum that will target practical understanding and ability to carry out gender-sensitive programming in context. Activities will include:



Men and women from NABDP, DoWA, and SIKA-East attended a three-day Training of Trainers workshop in Kabul.

### PROVIDING GENDER MAINSTREAMING TRAINING AND GUIDANCE

SIKA-East will deliver gender training modules for male and female SIKA-East staff and for IDLG, MRRD, and DDA+ partners to sharpen gender awareness and to learn techniques to engage both men and women in dialogue on gender. In addition, key SIKA-East ToTs will be reshaped to incorporate a gender dimension. Female staff will be targeted for participation to ensure they are prepared to act as knowledgeable and active trainers.

### CONDUCTING GENDER RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

SIKA-East will undertake research to highlight gender facets of key processes, e.g. DDA+ membership selection, planning, resource allocation, and service delivery. Examining the five gender dimensions, the research will be used to inform programming and assist partners to benefit from good practices and lessons learned.



## STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

To broaden spheres of influence for women leaders and to enhance their participation in civic affairs, SIKA-East will expand outreach efforts and provide platforms for engagement with GIRoA and other key actors. Activities will include:

**“...the SIKA-East gender team works with program units to integrate gender into the program implementation cycle and activity design, taking into consideration both male and female perspectives”**



District Entities in Mohammad Agha District, Logar Province, conduct a site visit of Nazeer Qala Abbazak Karez project, which was identified as a priority by men and women during the district strategic planning process.

themes include elimination of violence against women, enhanced access to economic development opportunities, and institutional linkages. Such activities will also serve as valuable entry points to inform and motivate women to engage in the civic sphere and build alliances with male allies.

## ENHANCING GENDER-SENSITIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

SIKA-East will introduce a stronger gender lens into the design and implementation of projects; this will help women and men alike to appreciate needs and benefits from different perspectives. In addition, SIKA-East will heighten technical support for key projects that amplify female voice, inclusion, and benefits that respond to female priorities. Activities will include:

## STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES

SIKA-East will employ measures to strengthen institutional linkages and assure consultation on technical implementation and quality. In coordination with IDLG and MRRD, SIKA-East will facilitate project working groups as forums for input and coordination of key initiatives; with the opportunity to share expertise, inform implementation, leverage and coordinate projects, and generate practical momentum to network across areas.

## ENGAGING SERVICE PROVIDERS TO IMPROVE QUALITY

The program will organize regular project meetings with grant-funded service providers to link, coordinate, and assist those working on similar initiatives. This will enhance the consistency of

## DEVELOPING FEMALE OUTREACH GUIDANCE, RESOURCES, AND PRACTICE

SIKA-East will liaise with partners to develop resources to help outreach and engagement of women. This will be achieved through dialogue with provincial and district stakeholders on best practices, along with distribution of an outreach guide that shares time-tested strategies. Strengthening outreach in practice, SIKA-East will collaborate with IDLG and MRRD to review and adapt the stakeholder engagement process and roll out the improved version across the districts. This will augment the pool of active female stakeholders, enabling more representative leadership for women in district affairs.

## SUPPORTING CONFERENCES, EVENTS, AND ACTIONS AS PLATFORMS FOR KEY ISSUES

SIKA-East will support thematic conferences and activities that reach wide audiences. These opportunities will raise the profile of key issues, and create enabling conditions to build coalitions and catalyze action on issues of interest and concern to women. Additionally, SIKA-East will assist partners to reach women through female-focused events that provide high-profile platforms to speak to issues of interest and concern voiced by women during district planning. Illustrative

services delivered as well as enable cross-provider sharing of good ideas and innovative approaches. It will provide a forum to regularly engage with and guide providers about the quality and effectiveness of services, and enable peer support.

## GENDER TEAM

SIKA-East has established a Kabul-based gender team as a focal point for cross-cutting gender mainstreaming support. The team by extension includes gender officers in each province. Embedded in the Institutional Strengthening and Stabilization (ISS) Unit, the team provides technical guidance and oversight for the integration of gender across all program activities, raising gender competency across SIKA-East staff.

The team advises executive leadership on mainstreaming SIKA-East's internal management and operations framework, such as assisting SIKA-East to enact measures to encourage female candidates during recruitment, to audit and improve the female-friendliness of the work environment, and to involve female staff in all elements of programming, not just female-focused activities.

In addition to technically advising gender field staff and facilitating training on gender awareness, the SIKA-East gender team works with program units to integrate gender into the program implementation cycle and activity design, taking into consideration both male and female perspectives. The team also supports the design, implementation, and oversight of select activities that contribute to mainstreaming.



**SIKA-East Senior Gender Officers addresses participants during a DDA+ conference in Logar Province.**

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> IDLG, "Sub-National Governance Policy" 2010 <http://jawzjan.gov.af/Content/Media/Documents/SNGP-English-Afghanistan307201192625245553325325.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> MRRD "Gender Policy", *Investing in Gender as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy*, [http://mrrd.gov.af/Content/files/English%20Gender%20Policy%20Final\(2\).pdf](http://mrrd.gov.af/Content/files/English%20Gender%20Policy%20Final(2).pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan IDLG and MRRD, "Policy for Improving Governance and Development in Districts and Villages", 2013 <http://www.mrrd-nabdp.org/attachments/article/373/Policy%20for%20Improving%20Governance%20and%20Development%20in%20Districts%20and%20Villages%20%28ENG%29.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> The DDA+ is a voluntary leadership council formed under the aegis of IDLG, MRRD, and SIKA-East to enable improved representation, governance, security, and service delivery. The DDA+ includes District Development Assembly and District Community Council members along with other influential local leaders.

<sup>v</sup> *Parda* in practice in SIKA-East's areas includes women's physical segregation from unrelated men, limited public visibility, and covering of the body. A *mahram* is a male member or children of a woman's immediate family who escort her during travel and events outside her community.



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